



The Impact of Rising Food Costs on GMHC’s Meals and Nutrition Program

This past year, the Gay Men’s Health Crisis Meals, Nutrition Education and Wellness Services program served over 96,000 meals. The program also provides social support for its clients as hot meals are served in a cheerful, congregate setting. Program participants exchange information about the challenges of HIV treatment, connection to HIV-specific medical care, improved health outcomes, and living with HIV/AIDS at meals.

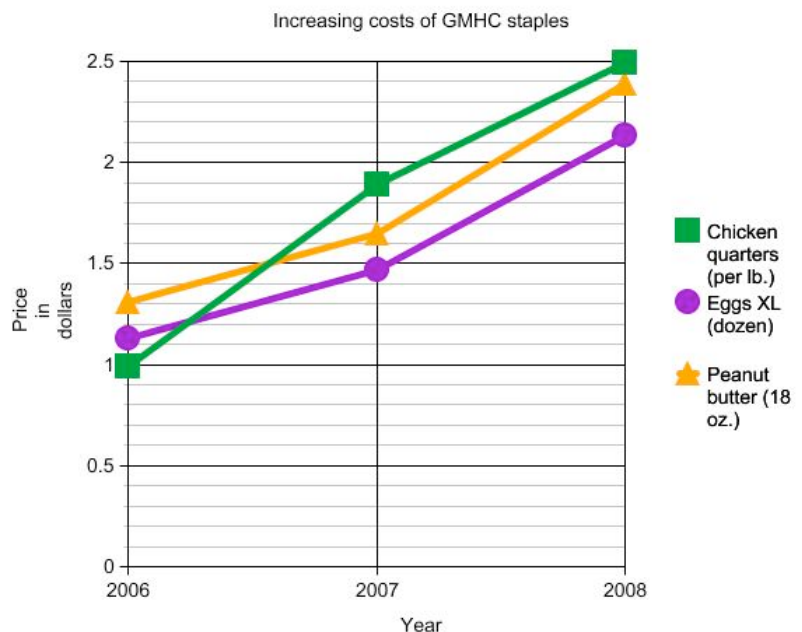
In addition to on-site meals, the program also distributed 4,020 pantry bags last year. In addition, program staff conducted 631 nutrition counseling sessions last year.

The GMHC Meals program is crucial for many of the most in-need people living with HIV/AIDS living in New York City. For many, it is the only hot meal they receive each day.

Medical Outcomes of Malnutrition for People Living with HIV/AIDS

HIV-positive individuals who suffer from poor nutrition are at a much higher risk of developing severe infections, like tuberculosis, which can result in premature death. HIV-positive mothers who are malnourished are more likely to give birth to low-birth-weight babies who are likely to have weakened immune systems. This increases the risk that the babies will be infected by their mothers during breastfeeding.

Research shows that people who are malnourished when they start taking anti-retrovirals are six times more likely to die than those who are well-nourished.¹ They are also more likely to suffer side-effects and stop taking the drugs, which can result in the virus becoming drug-resistant.²



In addition, individuals who do not have access to the basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, and clothing often engage in high-risk behaviors in exchange for a meal or a roof over their head, put themselves at risk for co-infection of HIV, and increasing the possibilities for transmitting HIV to others. This is another critical reason that providing food for the most in-need and vulnerable is important.

¹ The International Food Policy Research Institute, *HIV/AIDS and Food and Nutrition Security: From Evidence to Action*, 2005.

² Ibid.

The Rising Cost of Food

The cost of food has risen dramatically in recent years. A recent article in *The Boston Globe* states that wholesale food prices are rising nationwide at the fastest rate since 2003.³ Grocery stores and other food retailers are passing along the increases to consumers, raising prices for basic food items. The main trigger of the recent hikes in food cost is record prices for oil. Commodity prices have risen very quickly. For instance, the price of corn per bushel rose from \$2.28 in 2006 to \$5.46 in 2008. The price of wheat per bushel rose from \$3.48 in 2006 to \$11.21 in 2008.⁴ The following table illustrates sharp increases in food costs nationwide.

Increasing cost of food nationally⁵

PRODUCT	2007	2008	Percentage Increase
Flour (all purpose, per lb.)	0.34	0.42	24%
Ground beef (per lb.)	2.19	2.33	6%
Whole chicken (per lb.)	1.03	1.16	13%
Whole milk (per gal.)	3.07	3.87	26%

GMHC has felt the burden of the increased cost of food, and is struggling to continue to meet the community's need. The GMHC Meals program has seen increases in meal costs: in 2007, a meal cost \$3.51. In 2008, the cost has increased to \$3.80 per meal. We anticipate serving 4,000 more meals in 2008 despite a 30% decrease in overall funding for food for our Meals Program.

The Meals and Nutrition program budget is just over \$1 million, almost half of which is supported by the New York City Ryan White program. Due to recent cuts in federal funding of Ryan White programs, programs like nutrition and food that we know to be critical for access to medical care and facilitate overall health and wellness are in great jeopardy.

Foods considered staples at GMHC are becoming increasingly expensive. For instance, a slice of whole wheat bread has risen a full 100% from 2006 to 2008: 12 cents to 24 cents. Thirty-two ounces of milk has gone from \$1.50 to \$2.00. The cost of a dozen eggs has risen a full dollar, from \$1.13 in 2006 to \$2.13 in 2008. Thirteen ounces of coffee has risen from \$3.96 in 2006 to \$6.63 in 2008. The following table, showing how much GMHC pays for staples of its kitchen, illustrates how the national increase in food cost has directly affected GMHC's program.

Increasing cost of specific items purchased by GMHC

PRODUCT	2006	2007	2008	Percentage Increase, 2006 – 2008
Spaghetti (per lb.)	0.68	0.90	1.08	59%
Beef stew cubes (per lb.)	2.65	2.49	3.02	14%
Chicken quarters (per lb.)	0.99	1.89	2.49	152%
Ground turkey (per lb.)	1.09	1.35	1.79	64%
Peanut butter (18 oz.)	1.31	1.65	2.39	82%
Kernel corn (1 #10 can, 7 lb)	3.67	3.83	4.33	18%
Whole wheat bread (slice)	0.12	0.15	0.24	100%
Apple juice (46 oz.)	1.33	1.71	2.25	69%
Cranberry juice (46 oz.)	1.57	2.08	2.67	70%
1% Milk (32 oz.)	1.50	1.52	2.00	33%
Eggs XL (dozen)	1.13	1.47	2.13	89%
Coffee, regular (13 oz.)	3.96	4.79	6.63	67%

³ "Surging costs of groceries hit home." *Boston Globe*, March 9, 2008.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.